

Dives and Lazarus.

BEING THE
SUBSTANCE
OF A
DISCOURSE

DELIVERED IN
D U B L I N,
In the YEAR 1753.

By J O H N C E N N I C K.

“ Behold therefore the goodness and severity of
God.” Rom. xi. 22.

THE THIRD EDITION.

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Dives and Lazarus.

LUKE xvi. 31.

If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.

WITH these words our Saviour concludes the parable of Dives and Lazarus; wherein (after shewing the unhappy state of such as are rich, but without him, and the blessed condition of the poor who are in his favour) he makes Dives to pray out of his torment that Lazarus might go and preach to his five brethren, lest they should also perish; but Abraham, to whom he prayed, answered him, that they had the scriptures, "They have, saith he, Moses and the prophets, let them hear them." Dives still thinks, that if Lazarus went from the dead and appeared to them in the height of their

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mirth and banqueting, assuring them that their brother, who had lived like them in pleasure, was now lost, and so warn them to repent, that it would have a better effect than all preaching; but Abraham tells him, "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither would they be persuaded though one rose from the dead."

In this parable our Saviour has greatly honoured the sacred scriptures, and taught all his people in future ages to think exceeding reverently of the words of God, besides warning the rich and such as have this world's goods, lest they have their portion in this life, and teaching common people and such as are poor and in adversity, that they may set their affections on things above, and have treasure in heaven.

There are many lessons to be learned through the whole; and as all these parables were spoken for the instruction of the sincere followers of Christ, that they may be wise to eternal life, shunning every danger, and escaping the wrath to come, I wish all who are my hearers to-day may give the greater attention while I speak a few words on this parable, and make some observations in the course of reading it.

Our Saviour delivers the parable thus, "There was a certain rich man which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and who fared sumptuously every day." This is the description of what the world calls a happy man. He was rich, and so a stranger to want, nakedness, and all the miseries of that kind which poor people are subject to. He did not know what it was to be pinched with hunger, suffer thirst, or cold, or weariness; no oppressing creditors bore hard upon him, nor was he made to serve under the rigour of superiors.

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He had many servants, a fine house, and perhaps slept on beds of down and ivory. His riches kept him in favour with his friends, and carried him above the envy and contempt of his foes. I doubt not but he had often thanked God that he was rich, and rejoiced that his fortune was so considerable in the world.

“He was cloathed in purple” The Tyrian purple of the antients was of all colours most costly, so that none but kings and persons of the first rank in the world wore it. This was his dress, and adorned, I suppose, with embroidery and gold; beside, he had fine linen, and all that could serve to make him splendid and comfortable. Nor was he only rich, and thus grand and princely in his apparel, but “he fared sumptuously every day.” He had not often his table spread with delicacies, but always. Every day the fat of the land, the most precious fruits, the daintiest victuals came before him. Nor was he alone, his five brethren lived the same luxurious and high life; they had doubtless the best company, and had plenty of wine, and drank strong drink, out of cups of silver and gold. All round waited their servants, and subjects, and dancing, and music, and merry discourse passed their many days and nights away pleasantly. Had one seen them singing over their bowls of rich wines, or wantonly sporting with harlots, without care, without bounds to their excess and pleasures, high with honour and respect, full of mirth, and loaden with riches, one might have thought, how happy is this rich man in his company! no doubt he had heard the law, for he was a child of Abraham; he had been sometimes present when the prophets were read, but it had no great effect upon him; perhaps he had rode in his chariot on certain days,

days, and frequented thus the temple and synagogues out of fashion, or to divert away a spare hour, but his heart was untouched with any thing he heard; perhaps the priests whom he chose to hear, prophesied smooth things, and he liked to have it so. He contemned the mopes in religion, and such as were devoted to sacred things, as half mad men, melancholy, persons of no taste, and enthusiasts, and would not be such a fool to let over much religion destroy him.

In short he seemed at first view to be a vessel of honour, and highly favoured, a man whom heaven had blessed, and to whom God had opened his hand and been doubly liberal. There are thousands who have wished to be thus happy, and perhaps many of us now present can lay our hand on our heart and say, I am the man.

In the same city and in the same country with this great man, was "a certain poor person, a beggar, named Lazarus, who lay at the rich man's gate full of sores, desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table," who had no friends or company, excepting the dogs who came and licked his sores. Behold one as miserable as the other was happy! He seemed to be neglected by all his fellow-creatures, and an out-cast of the God of nature, a vessel of disgrace and dishonour. He had no sponsable and wealthy friends, but was left an orphan, and exposed to the piercing afflictions of want and poverty. He had no house, but lay at the gate of Dives; had no bed but the ground; was sick and full of wounds, and had no physician, no comfortable cordial, no plaister, no friend or pitying neighbour. While the one in the house rolled in plenty, he languished with hunger, and all his moans and cries, though only for "the crumbs

crumbs which fell from the table," were unheard and unregarded. He had no cloaths but rags, so that the cold pinched him without, and hunger and sickness within. Instead of pitying the poor beggar, it seems as if those of the house had set the dogs at him to drive him from the door, who were more merciful than their master, "they licked his sores." This was all the ease and comfort he had; and thus between sickness, hunger and nakedness he was worn out and at last died.

All that passed by him must surely have felt a certain chill and horror at the sight of his wretched corpse, and esteemed his end miserable. It is likely his bones were laid in some ditch, or buried among dunghills, and to all outward appearance one should have concluded, this man lived and died unhappy to the last degree; but therein, such as judged after a human way would have been sadly mistaken, that poor man was at peace with God, he had made a blessed use of his affliction, out of the deep of it he had cried to the Lord and was heard; he had made his part sure in the book of life, and in the favour of the Lord his God. It is true, he had little or none of the good things of this world, his eyes had been often red with weeping, and his poor heart inured to distress and sighing, but he had obtained the love of God, and knew his Redeemer lived; this comforted him till the angel of death released him and he died. There was then an end to his penury and needs; all the tears were wiped away from his eyes, all sorrow left his aching heart; his sickness sunk his spirits and weighed him down no more; no more his wounds and sores smarted, nor his hunger pinched his poor carcase; he heard no more the menaces and threatnings of such as would not relieve him; no, all was over now,
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and "the angels carried him to Abraham's bosom." While his body was finding rest in some nasty but quiet spot, the blessed spirits who stood round him as he died, and who waited for the appointed moment, now sung him up to the paradise of God. How sweet was heaven to his weary soul! how sweet, how transporting the kingdom to him, who had been a beggar and the outcast of all the world? He could not any more weep at his hard lot, or sigh that he had been so poor; he rather could adore before the throne that he had been afflicted, and saved from "trusting to uncertain riches," and weaned from the world, and that a better portion had been designed for him by his merciful Creator. O how must he bless the wisdom of God, and his unsearchable goodness in saving him, and for changing his want to eternal riches, his rags to God's righteousness, his dunghill to a throne, and his poor troublesome life to a life eternal! Instead of dogs to lick his sores, angels attend him and hail him to his thrice blessed home and harbour, where he shall rest for ever and ever!

But now we will leave him in his glory and return to the rich glutton in his pomp and splendor, "who also died and was buried." All his gold and silver could not purchase him a renewal, or longer term of life; he died, and left all his companions, his costly furniture, his fine raiment, and plentiful table; he died and went into another state, whither his gold could not be carried, "neither could his pomp follow him." There is no mention made of the beggar's funeral, it was too mean and insignificant to notice; if he was not cast out into the open fields to the beasts and birds of prey, it is likely, as I before observed, he was buried with the burial of an ass; but Dives was buried:

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He, no doubt, was laid in state, and his hearse attended with mourners, and such as were skilful in lamentation, and in solemn magnificence interred in the sepulchres of his fathers; but O; while his brethren and friends were bearing their once rich brother with such splendor to the grave, his soul sunk down to hell, "and in hell he lift up his eyes being in torments, and saw Abraham afar off and Lazarus in his bosom. Amazing change! his pleasures are turned to torments, his riches to eternal wants, his scarlet and purple robes to purple and scarlet flames of fire, his bowls of new wine to insatiable thirst, his music to howlings, his fine house to the bottomless pit, his brethren and merry company to devils and wicked spirits. "He lifted up his eyes," but saw no more grandeur and delicate things; he should have opened them before, and have seen the things that made for his peace, but now they were hid from him, he opened his eyes too late. It is true he saw Abraham and Lazarus in glory, but it was afar off; yes, there he saw the same beggar he suffered to perish without mercy at his gate; he saw him now in the bosom of the friend of God; he beheld him who was once unworthy his notice, sitting among the favourites of the God of Abraham; and he who had scarce any covering, while Dives wallowed in riches and was cloathed with purple and finelinen, now was cloathed with the white and fine linen which is the righteousness of the saints, and in which they stand without spot before the throne. He had not minded his cries once, but now he cries for his help, "and he cried and said, Father Abraham have mercy upon me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame." He perhaps had never pray-

ed before, and now prays when it is too late, but he prayed to Abraham. It is the only prayer in the scripture made to the saints, and is a prayer made in vain. He called Abraham, father, but found it did not avail to have had believing or good parents, without having their experience of the love of God, and trod the steps of the faith of Abraham. No more strong drink and new wine refreshed him; he begs not a drop of water, but less if possible, for he prays only that "Lazarus might dip the tip of his finger in water to cool his tongue." See how he intreats mercy from him to whom he would shew no mercy! Thus shall it be in the day when Jesus comes; then the despised and persecuted few, who loved him in the world, and who for his sake were hated, abused, slandered, reviled, and as it were, "killed all the day long," shall be honourable in their sight who slighted and used them ill. They shall then worship at their feet, and sue for mercy with shame and confusion. This honour shall have all the saints. Thus Dives behaves to Lazarus, when he intreats Abraham to send him to ease him. "Have mercy upon me, he says, my father Abraham." This would have been a pretty prayer if made to the Father of mercies, and made in "the day of grace, and in the acceptable year of the Lord;" but now Abraham answers, "Son, remember that thou in thy life-time receivedst thy good things, and Lazarus his evil things, but now he is comforted and thou art tormented." Abraham calls him son, but it did him no good; he expostulates with him, and shews the equitable dealings of justice; he bids him "remember, that once as he loved the world and the things of the world, so he had them, and had his portion in this life; and as he slighted grace, and the riches and things of the life to come, so they were

were far from him.' On the other hand, he says, 'Poor Lazarus, who had no good things here, but was a man of sorrows, was not of the world, but chose his part above, so the world hated him and forsook him; but now he is arrived to his treasure, and shall be comforted for evermore.

Hear this, ye who count them happy who live in pleasure, and who make merry as in a day of slaughter! ye, who are continually heaping up gold, and "who fare sumptuously every day!" ye, who ride on horses and in chariots, and feel no evil! and ye who are continually wishing for honour, and desiring to be great and rich, or to enjoy large possessions in the world, O hear it and tremble, and change your wishes into prayers for mercy, and a part at God's right hand! Remember, 'they that love the world, and the things of the world, have not the love of the Father in them; and that a man cannot be a friend of the world without being an enemy of God.' Desire not then to have here a fulness, but if you have it, behave as stewards of "the mammon of unrighteousness," and remember the strict account you must one day make. Have you no more than food, and raiment convenient? be content, and know you are better off than your Lord. Or do you suffer want, or are poor? pray to have Lazarus's sure kingdom in the better world, and be not unhappy with cares, but give up yourselves and your wants to the care of your heavenly Father, who careth for you. Let not riches, or finery, or gay apparel, or pleasures, or wantonness, or lusts be a snare to you; be released from all, and "touch not the unclean thing;" keep out of the danger, and follow your plain and lowly Lord through the world, and have your glory where it is eternal, and let your riches be durable riches and righteousness.

Many

Many have made another choice, and repented it for ever. Abraham tells Dives, that there was now no passing from one state and place to the other ; a gulph, an infinite space was between. When he found this, he prays Abraham, at least, to let Lazarus go to his father's house, where his brethren lived in the same wicked way, to preach and forewarn them, lest they should come into the same torment and perish in the same way. Abraham answers, " They have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them. Nay, he said, " father Abraham, but if one would rise from the dead they would repent." As if he would say, ' O ! I know how it was with me, I know how I jeered such as spake of danger ; I know their thoughts of all preaching, they slight it as I did ; they despise the scriptures, and atheistically mock religion, but if such an one as Lazarus, whom they knew to be dead, would go and appear to them, and tell them, Your brother is in eternal flames, he is lost, and crying out in his torments, repent or you shall all likewise perish, then they would hear.' But Abraham tells him, If they will not hearken to the law and to the testimony, if the word of God has no effect, and they regard not Moses and the prophets, " neither would they be persuaded though one rose from the dead." They would still in their wanton manner scoff, and endeavour to account for it in a natural way ; they would deem it fancy or a juggle of the religious, or look upon it as a dream, and harden their hearts still more. If a message from the Lord God of their fathers is not received, nor the testimony of his children, the witnesses, then no miracle would be of service, and if one rose from the dead it would be in vain.

It should not seem that Dives's fear of having his brethren and wicked companions follow him into his

his misery, came out of love or compassion for them, so much as his dread of their increasing his pain and plagues, since he had helped them on in sin, had been the abettor of their evil deeds, and encouraged them to drink, game, whore, revel, blaspheme and be infidels and irreligious to their ruin. He knew how it must add to his woes, to be the cause of their judgment and damnation, and therefore would by all means have hindered it; but all was gone too far, it was too late, and he left to feel the heavy wages of sin, with all the dreadful consequences which increase perpetually.

It is indeed a striking parable, and meant mercifully to comfort the poor and distressed people, by pointing to the kingdom where they are encouraged to seek their portion and to apply to our Saviour, that he may forgive them their sins, and make them "heirs of a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and of treasure that no moth nor rust can corrupt; nor thief break through and steal." O that all the common people, the poor, the indigent, the outwardly miserable and afflicted people would by means of this parable come to him who spake it, and obtain of him Lazarus's portion. He spake it for this end, and this was his chief view. Let not your heavy circumstances in this world, your pressing necessities, weigh you down too much, and make you lose your confidence in the Friend of sinners, nor let it put you upon worldly and unlawful means to extricate yourselves, nor tempt you to murmur or complain; but take it in good part, and be satisfied with your evil things, and seek to have your good things with Jesus and his disciples in another world. Now before you are called away, beseech him to give you a true living faith in him, that thereby you may be persuaded of his everlasting love to you, the feeling of which will keep you happy, and
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at peace, under the most oppressing and grievous trials; it will sweeten your passage through the world, and comfort you beyond all you can think or wish.

When you have no friend or dear companion, you will not be destitute, he will be near to you, he "will never leave nor forsake you." Instead of riches you shall have his merits, his kingdom, the treasures of his peace and salvation; you shall not want, you shall be happy, and your latter end will be blessed; the holy angels shall carry you home, and Jesus, your dear Saviour Jesus shall kiss you and take you in peace to himself. Till then be content to be here a pilgrim and stranger, a poor and needy follower of the Lamb; be content to be hated, to be dishonourable and despised; in a very little while you shall see all the cloud blow over, and the time of the singing of birds shall come; you shall go into your Master's joy, and into the house he prepared for you in the New Jerusalem, to go no more out world without end.

Our Saviour had this also in view in this parable, namely, to warn kindly the wild, the rash, the giddy and wanton part of mankind to escape the perils and sad estate of such as hear not the loving calls of his Holy Spirit, but eagerly covet the world and seek happiness there, and so miss the kingdom of God. The rich, the gluttonous, the epicure, the miser, the lustful, the lovers of pleasure and the world are in a dangerous condition; they can easily be deceived and cry, peace, peace to their poor hearts, while the world smiles, and they prosper and go on undisturbed, till suddenly they are summoned to depart this life, and, like foolish virgins, they awake out of the pleasing delusion, and are miserable for ever.

But our Saviour had yet in view to magnify the scriptures and make them honourable. They are his

his true sayings and may not be trifled with, despised, or slighted. Who looks for miracles and wonders, and thinks he could be converted by that means, and thinks little of the oracles of God, he is a deceived person. The scriptures are never alone, but the power of God always accompanies them, so that with majesty they are sounded to the heart, and with a divine conviction that they are from heaven. If therefore a man has so long disregarded the striving of the Spirit with him, that by little and little he ceases to respect the scripture, and at last is no longer persuaded to hear them, is no longer to be convinced by them, nor looks to experience the precious promises they contain, nor is awed by the threatnings, nor courted or prevailed upon by the intreaties and calls therein,, but is willingly ignorant of them, is dead to all they say, opposes manifest truths declared therein, and can venture to dispute doctrines, which in his conscience he believes are taught there, and was the mind of Jesus and his disciples, then it is gone far indeed, and the rising of one from the dead to attempt his conversion might be dreaded, and thought to be in vain.

As the Apostle of our profession humbled himself to read out of the scriptures, reasoned out of them with men, with his disciples, "and expounded out of them the things concerning himself," and also therewith answered the tempter to set us a pattern, let us be his followers, and, as it is written, so believe, so act in every thing, that we may not only shew to others we believe and are disciples of him whose oracles they are, but also happily experience the fulfilling of the promises in our hearts, and be witnesses that they are true and faithful, to the glory of Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom be praise and blessings for ever and ever ! Amen.

A PRAYER.

A P R A Y E R.

O GOD my Saviour, I beseech thee for thy tender mercies sake, let not the deceitfulness of riches, nor any of the things of the world get my affections, nor suffer thou my own desires and lusts to blind my eyes to the pleasures at thy right hand.

Be pleased to make me a stranger and pilgrim here, and let faith in thee be my riches, thy word my lanthorn and staff in this dark world; and let my unfeigned love to thee, and my continual thirst to be for ever in thy favour, make me think little of all carnal joys and happiness. In all company and in all places draw me after thee. Give me a sensible conviction of thy love to me, and the assurance that I am born again of thy Spirit, and made a child of God; and let me know that all my sins are forgiven and buried in thy wounds, and in the red sea of thy blood for ever.

I will be thine body and soul, O keep that which I entrust to thy care till the day of restitution, and in all dangers be near me. If I should be rash, or run in a way which is not right, or should mistake thy mind, disappoint and hinder me; but O let my soul be still precious in thy sight, till the appointed time is come for me to depart. Then, my dear Saviour, let the angels carry me to thy bosom, and without fear or dread in the assurance of faith, let me leave the world and come home to thee. Let this be my happy lot, and do what thou wilt with me here. Hear me, O thou good Shepherd of Israel, and grant my prayer for thy name's sake. Amen!

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